

JSU CLUB ACTIVITY



FREE WILL?

Time needed	30 minutes
Age range	Any group
Background of teen	Any background
Set up	Groups with tables to work on

Goals:

To consider the concept of free will and reflect on how much we focus on who we are versus what we do. Understand that free will is a moral choice and not about preferences.

Relevance:

Teens always have questions about their actions and whether or not they can be held accountable. This session informs that understanding.

Active Learning:

Give out packs of cards to students in groups.

Tell students to arrange the cards around an imaginary line down the desk (or make a line with painters tape for them). Free will is on one side and not free will on the other, the line shows the border. Cards should be placed on the desk showing what the group thinks: free will, totally not free will or near the center. Give them about 10- 15 minutes

Supplies needed:

1. 6 or so sets of the “free will cards”
2. Painters tape

Step by step planning:

Time	Facilitator Activity	Teen activity
10- 15 mins	Give out the free will cards and let teens arrange them	Arrange free will cards in groups with consensus
10 mins	Solicit group feedback	Volunteer rationales for card placement
10 mins	Run attached discussion	Discussion

Facilitation Questions:

1. Which card was the hardest to place?
2. Which card did the group agree on easily?
3. Which card made you unsure?
4. Who else agrees with this groups placement?
5. How did you know where to place the cards?

Wrap up message and Torah thought:

<p>Genesis 1:26,27</p>	<p>בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק א</p>
<p>1) And G-d said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.... 2) and G-d created the man in His own image, in the image of G-d He created him.</p>	<p>(כז) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְּדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וַיְבֹעֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְבַהֲמָהּ וַיְבַכְלֶהָרֶץ וַיְבַכְלֶהרֶמֶשׂ הָרֶמֶשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ: (כז) וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:</p>
<p>Seforno's Commentary</p>	<p>ספורנו בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק א</p>
<p>"As our likeness" refers to man's actions.... which are done with knowledge and consciously. Man's actions are somewhat similar to those of G-d who acts with free will.</p>	<p>כדמותנו. בענין המעשיות שידמה בהם קצת לפמליא של מעלה, בצד מה שהם פועלים בידיעה ובהכרה. אמנם פעולתם היא בלתי בחיירית, ובזה לא ידמה להם האדם, ובקצת ידמה האדם לאל יתברך, הפועל בבחירה. אמנם בחירת האל יתברך היא לעולם לטוב, ולא כן הבחירה האנושית.</p>

<p>Maimonides, Mishna Torah, Laws of Repentance 5:1</p>	<p>רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ה</p>
<p>Liberty is given to every individual. If he wants to turn himself towards a good path and be righteous, the power is in his hands; and if he wants to turn himself towards the path of evil, the power is in his hands.... Man is unique in the world and there is no other creature similar to him in this regard: that he on his own, with his knowledge and thoughts, will know good and evil and do whatever he wants, and there is nobody who will prevent him from doing good or evil.</p>	<p>הלכה א רשות לכל אדם נתונה אם רצה להטות עצמו לדרך טובה ולהיות צדיק הרשות בידו, ואם רצה להטות עצמו לדרך רעה ולהיות רשע הרשות בידו, הוא שכתוב בתורה הן האדם היה כאחד ממנו לדעת טוב ורע, כלומר הן מין זה של אדם היה יחיד בעולם ואין מין שני דומה לו בזה הענין שיהא הוא מעצמו בדעתו ובמחשבתו יודע הטוב והרע ועושה כל מה שהוא חפץ ואין מי שיעכב בידו מלעשות הטוב או הרע וכיון שכן הוא פן ישלח ידו</p>

<p>Maimonides, Mishna Torah, Laws of Repentance 5:2-3</p>	<p>רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ה</p>
<p>Everyone has free will - at the point where truth meets falsehood...choice takes place at the point where the truth as the person sees it confronts the illusion produced in him by the power of falsehood...Many of a person's actions may happen to coincide with what is objectively right because he has been brought up that way and it does not occur to him to do otherwise, and many bad and false decisions may be taken simply because the person does not realize they are bad. In such cases no real choice has been made. Free will is exercised...only on the borderline between the forces of good and the forces of evil within that person... Education plays a large part in determining one's "point of free will". A person may have been brought up to do many good actions as a matter of course. All this means that his "point of free will" is at a high level. For example, one may have been brought up...among people who devote themselves to good deeds. In this case his "point of free will" will not be whether or not to commit an actual sin but whether to do a mitzvah with more or less devotion... Another may be brought up among thieves. For him, whether or not to steal does not present any choice at all; his "point of free will" might be on the question of shooting his way out when discovered. For him this may be the crucial choice; this is where for him the forces of good and evil are evenly balanced.</p>	<p>הלכה ב אל יעבור במחשבתך דבר זה שאומרים טפשי אומה"ע ורוב גולמי בני ישראל שהקב"ה גוזר על האדם מתחלת ברייתו להיות צדיק או רשע, אין הדבר כן אלא כל אדם ראוי לו להיות צדיק כמשה רבינו או רשע כירבעם או חכם או א סכל או רחמן או אכזרי או כילי או שוע וכן שאר כל הדעות, ואין לו מי שיכפהו ולא גוזר עליו ולא מי שמושכו לאחד משני הדרכים אלא הוא מעצמו ומדעתו נוטה לאי זו דרך שירצה, הוא שירמיהו אמר מפי עליון לא תצא הרעות והטוב, כלומר אין הבורא גוזר על האדם להיות טוב ולא להיות רע, וכיון שכן הוא נמצא זה החוטא הוא הפסיד את עצמו, ולפיכך ראוי לו לבכות ולקונן על חטאיו ועל מה שעשה לנפשו וגמלה רעה, הוא שכתוב אחריו מה יתאוון אדם חי וגו', וחזר ואמר הואיל ורשותנו בידינו ומדעתנו עשינו כל הרעות ראוי לנו לחזור בתשובה ולעזוב רשענו שהרשות עתה בידינו הוא שכתוב אחריו נחפשה דרכינו ונחקורה ונשובה וגו' . הלכה ג ודבר זה עיקר גדול הוא והוא עמוד התורה והמצוה שנאמר ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים, וכתוב ראה אנכי נתן לפניכם היום, כלומר שהרשות בידכם וכל שיחפוץ האדם לעשות ממעשה בני האדם עושה בין טובים בין רעים, ומפני זה הענין נאמר מי יתן והיה לבבם זה להם, כלומר שאין הבורא כופה בני האדם ולא גוזר עליהן לעשות טובה או רעה אלא הכל מסור להם.</p>

Education and environment cannot in any way change the essential act of free will, but only the location at which it takes place - the position of the "point of free will" on the moral scale. Every human being possesses the power of perceiving the truth available to him at his particular level.... In this there is no difference at all whether his upbringing raised or lowered his "point of free will". The ability to adopt the truth, as he knows it is equal in all situations.	
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Further discussion prompts: (Taken from: Shmooze)

1a. Do animals have free will?

1b. what is the difference between choosing a flavour of ice cream and choosing to return someone's lost wallet?

2. Does a poor person in a Third World country have the same power of free will as a wealthy person in North America?

ANIMALS DON'T HAVE FREE WILL

Human beings have a lot in common with animals. They eat, breathe and sleep; we eat, breathe and sleep. Are we different? Or is a human being just a walking, talking gorilla?

When we hear the news of a shark attack, we don't blame the shark. The shark is just doing what comes naturally.

When a human being attacks, the human being is held accountable for his or her actions.

A dog wakes up in the morning and decides what to eat first - his water or his dog food. A human being also wakes up and decides what he's going to eat for breakfast, his cereal or a bagel.

Humans and animals seem to both make decisions. What is the difference? Do dogs struggle with the thought that maybe its time to go on a diet? "My gosh, I've got to control this appetite!" Do they question whether it's right to finish off the last drop of milk and not leave any for their kennel-mates? Does a dog wake up in the morning plagued with existential questions like, what am I here for? Does it worry how its life is making a difference, or if it is actualizing its potential?

We do have a lot in common with animals, but not free will. Free will is not a matter of choosing your favorite ice cream, or what to eat for breakfast. That is just a matter of preference. To exercise your free will, the choice must include a moral dimension and precipitates a struggle between right and wrong. Free will is the choice between good and evil. Only mankind has the ability to discern right from wrong and make moral judgments. It is this ability that makes human beings responsible for their actions.

When a dog goes all over the furniture - we don't make the dog pay the dry cleaning bill. It's either our fault for not training him properly or it's just an accident. We don't suspect the dog chose to do it on purpose and really could have chosen otherwise.

When your 24-year-old roommate sets the couch on fire - he's out on the street and has to pay for damages. Free will is mankind's unique and crowning distinction. The Torah says that only mankind was created "in the image of G-d". G-d doesn't have an image. It means that only mankind has the true freedom and independence that comes with the power of choice. In that way we resemble the Almighty who is completely free and independent.

The next time you encounter a moral dilemma, use your free will! You can rise above your base instincts and ennoble your life through choosing good. We don't expect animals to strive to be good. This is our responsibility.

IN SUMMARY

- Mankind is different from animal in that since man has free will, as he is created in G-D's image. Just as G-d is a free and independent power, so is man.
- Free will is not choosing an ice cream flavor. It is the ability to choose between good and evil.
- Free will creates responsibility. Humans, not dogs, are accountable for their actions, since only man can discern between right and wrong.

EQUAL MEASURES OF FREE WILL

Every person is born with a unique set of circumstances that are beyond his control. Some people are born into a loving home with two caring parents and the best of everything, while others have to struggle merely to stay alive.

Everyone possesses a unique personality composed of various natural strengths and weaknesses, and a specific amount of potential. Some are born with great intelligence and patience, while others are born rather slow and selfish.

All of humanity has one thing in common: the power of free will. Where we began in life wasn't within our control. However, we are responsible for where we end up and the choices we make along the way. How have we grown (or regressed) from our starting point?

Someone in a Third World country deciding whether or not to share his small bowl of rice may be a choice of the same magnitude as someone in North America deciding whether or not to make a substantial donation to charity. The quality of struggle is equal and the same power of free will is accessible to both of them. Free will is the defining quality of a human being, and is equally shared by all, regardless his position in life.

IN SUMMARY

- Even though every person is born with a distinct personality in a unique set of circumstances, we all share the power to choose.
- Man is not responsible for where he began in life; but is responsible for how far he reaches and how much potential is actualized.
- The quality of struggle is the same for a rich man as for a poor man, within their respective challenges. The same power of free will is accessible to both.

FREE WILL CARDS

MONEY

LOOKS

JOB

HANDWRITING

RELIGION

COMPASSION

CULTURE

COUGHS
AND
COLDS

JOB

HEALTH

LONGEVITY

HAPPINESS

NACHAS

FRIENDS

MARRIAGE

FAMILY

SIBLINGS

FINDING
A SOUL
MATE

MATURITY

SPIRITUALITY

SENSE OF
HUMOR

INTELLECT

TEMPER

EDUCATION

BELIEF IN
GOD

LOVE

FAVORITE
FOOTBALL
TEAM

FAVORITE
FOOD

POPULARITY

EMOTIONAL
INTELLIGENCE

HABITS

FRIENDLINESS

TALENTS